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Holiday cheer

BERND FRANKE/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

E.L. Crossley Secondary School's marching band treats people along the Pelham Santa Claus Parade route with the sounds of the holiday season on Saturday. Below: Steaming hot chili served by Fabulous Fenwick Lions member Bill King took the edge of the chill in the air at a community get-together at Centennial Park following the parade. See more on page A2.

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Pelham to walk, bike, roll and hike to master plan

WAYNE CAMPBELL
Special to Postmedia Network

Pelham now has a $33,000 active transportation master plan that lays out 10 priority areas for the next 10 to 15 years.

Last Monday, town council accepted a policy committee recommendation to adopt the plan.

It took consultants 11 months of surveys, meetings, open houses and mapping to assemble it for the Pelham active transportation committee.

Consultant Claire Basinski, with WSP/ MMM Group, on Nov. 21 told council the master plan is a guide for developing 153.5 kilometres of sidewalks, bike lanes and other services across the town.

By accepting it, she said, councillors were not financially committing the town. They would use it during council's regular budgeting process.

It is a planning tool to enhance active transportation when for developing roads, trails, sidewalks and other services, she said.

The master plan calls for town councillors and staff to pay attention to the needs for walking, cycling, hiking, and, rolling chairs and strollers in 10 parts of the town:

- New road linkages in east Fonthill;
- Steve Bauer Trail surface upgrade;
- Improved trail on Station Street;
- Signed bicycle routes;
- Paved shoulder along Foss Road;
- Signed bike route on River Road;
- Sidewalk to E.L. Crossley Secondary School;
- Signed route on Maple and Church streets;
- Sharrow (shared lane markings for bikes and cars) at Regional Road 20 and Pelham Street;
- Bikes lanes and sharrows along Regional Road 20.

The plan also recommends: the town consider active transportation in day-to-day decisions, plan for improvement and changes, engage partners in implementation, and continue educating residents and visitors.

Mayor Dave Augustyn said some of the items in the master plan are already in the town's long-term capital plans.

Town council recently gave a nod to a three-metre wide paved sidewalk to E.L. Crossley along the south side of Regional Road 20 from Lookout Street. However, Ward 2 Coun. Gary Accursi has raised concerns, both at council and committee, about risks of a walk beside the busy highway.

Pelham has had an active transportation advisory committee for a decade.

It promotes walking, cycling, and other activities for healthy living, safe travel and a connected community.

The committee's advice has led to sidewalks along Pelham Street and other roads, signalled crosswalks, trail extensions and improvements, cycling and walking safety programs and the planning for active transportation in new east Fonthill developments.

The committee requested the master plan to guide the town's active transportation development into the future.

Fabulous fun in Fenwick

BERND FRANKE
Postmedia Network

In this season of giving, the Pelham Santa Claus Parade was all over the calendar when it came to giving something to everyone.

Chomping down on free hotdogs at a community get-together afterwards at Centennial Park had many people thinking back to Canada Day celebrations at the same location, albeit a little warmer.

OK, a lot warmer.

And, of course, with Santa's first visit to Pelham this season, the parade represented an early Christmas. An opportunity to promote your niceness, while downplaying your naughtiness, with the Jolly Ol' Elf himself.

For a sweet tooth such as Sutton Kilpatrick, Saturday afternoon's parade through Fenwick was a belated Halloween. Elves, paramedics and volunteer firefighters among them, walked alongside many of the 26 entries handing out treats to children.

Candy canes were by far the most popular, but children who lined both sides of the parade route also got to enjoy chocolates as they waited for the arrival of the guest of honour.

"Sometimes, they throw you candy. I really like that," the nine-year-old from Welland admitted with a grin.

Kilpatrick, who was accompanied by grandmother Carole Belanger of Fonthill and siblings Liam, 11, and Nyla, 2, brought along a blanket to keep him warm as he waited for more than a half-hour for the parade to start. The Holy Name Catholic School student said he wasn't worried about the blanket limiting his mobility when the time came to grab some goodies.

BERND FRANKE/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

The Fabulous Fenwick Lions, organizers of the Pelham Santa Claus Parade on Saturday, saved the best for last.

"I'll just throw it off and jump up when they throw it," Kilpatrick said with a laugh.

Just having the chance to spend time with her grandchildren was all the treats Belanger needed.

"I like to see their reactions to the sights and sounds," she said. "It's something to do with them."

Belanger wasn't a regular paradegoer as a child growing up in Welland.

"Once in a blue moon, but not too often. Now, I go all the time," she said. "We usually bring our own hot chocolate and cider."

"It's like I'm a kid again, thanks to them."

Thanks to his role as parade marshal Trevor Philbrick got to be Buddy the Elf again. In addition to being the overall organizer, the Fabulous Fenwick Lions member operated the reindeer-bedecked ATV that pulled Santa's sleigh at the tail end of the one-hour parade.

"The weather was perfect, and the turnout was great," he said as he looked at people lined up for chili, hot chocolate and hotdogs — all free — at the park.

With activities at the park as much a part of the festivities as the parade itself, Philbrick doubted Pelham would follow the lead of other communities in the region by holding a parade at night.

"It's all about the kids, and this gets more of them out," he said of keeping the parade a daytime event.

Pelham Mayor Dave Augustyn wouldn't change the start time either.

"It's really about the kids, it's all about families," said Augustyn, a parade regular while his children — son Lucas, now 15; and daughter Krystyna, 14 — were growing up.

"We've been to green parades, we've been to them when there were snow drifts this high, we've been to them all," the mayor said. "It's always a great family event, and we have the Fabulous Fenwick Lions to thank for that."

Cost of running the parade, now in its 19th year as a community event organized by the service club, is from proceeds from fundraising activities throughout the year.

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Students receive code to create

MICHELLE ALLENBERG
Postmedia Network

A group of eager students at Welland's Diamond Trail Public School learned how to code last Thursday morning.

About 45 Grade 3 student gathered in front of laptops in the library branch adjacent to the elementary school to create their very own games. They were given instructions and, with the help of teachers and volunteers, created simple games using computer coding.

Josie Faccini was part of a group that spearheaded bringing the Ladies Learning Code Niagara Chapter to the region. Ladies Learning Code is a not-for-profit organization that runs workshops for women and youth who want to learn computer programming.

The program is beginner-friendly and teaches a number of technical skills that can be useful in everyday life. The organization has a number of programs, including Girls Learning Code and Kids Learning Code.

Melissa Sariffodeen, co-founder and chief executive officer of the organization, said there is a need for Women Learning Code in Canada because there are groups of people that aren't involved in the technology fields.

She said only about 20 per cent of the roles in information communication technology are held by women. Sariffodeen said youth engagement is also low.

"When we think about the jobs of the future, we don't know them yet, but we do know that technology will have an increase," she said.

One of the reasons Faccini thought it would be good to have the program is to lay groundwork for youth. Faccini said she had spoken to many local female entrepreneurs who don't know how to code, but would find the skill beneficial as business owners.

After hearing this, Faccini said she thought teaching children would be a great way to prepare them for the future.

"This is an interesting thing, too, is that the whole time that all these women were saying these are the barriers I face, financial literacy, technology, are all things that if they were taught when they were young in schools," Faccini said. "They wouldn't have been barriers for them."

Last year the Educational Research and Innovation Hub (ihub) introduced a program to teach coding to students and familiarize them with technology. Anamaria Dragoi, manager of innovation and academic engagement at ihub, said the goal was to have students at the Niagara District School Board (DSBN) have a total of one million hours of hands-on experience.

Dragoi said the collaboration between ihub, DSBN and Ladies Learning Code was a good fit. She said all three are hoping to demystify coding so students don't feel intimidated.

"A lot of people tend to be afraid just hearing code, 'Like, oh my gosh, I'm not a computer science specialist," which is not true," Dragoi said.

Coding skills can be translated into everyday activities that don't involve a computer. She said learning how to code teaches people how to think analytically, follow instructions and problem solve.

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MICHELLE ALLENBERG/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Grade 3 students Brysson Slade and Raven Darrall receive help from ihub co-ordinator Alexis Kleiman, centre, and Josie Faccini, organizer, as they create a computer game during the Women Learning Code event at Diamond Trail Public School in Welland.

New program promotes housing partnerships

MARYANNE FIRTH
Postmedia Network

An innovative approach to affordable housing is being taken to lessen the lengthy local waiting list.

Niagara Regional Housing is introducing a new program that will support construction of new affordable units by private landlords.

The agency has its first partnership lined up under the New Development Housing Allowance program and, following approval of regional council last Thursday night, has made a 20-year commitment to fund 20 units in the new Bethlehem Housing and Support Services (BHSS) project.

The 80-unit project will be built at 111 Church St. in St. Catharines.

NRH will fund 20 units at a cost of $250 per month per unit for singles and $300 per month per unit for families.

NRH board chairman Paul Grenier, regional councillor for Welland, commended staff for developing an unconventional method for helping to address Niagara's growing housing need.

"This is an outstanding report before us," he said during the council meeting. "It is novel, creative and provides a great partnership to create housing units."

It's a program Grenier believes will gain traction throughout the province once it's introduced.

"It's something we can be truly proud of here in Niagara."

The BHSS project is taking place in collaboration with FirstOntario Credit Union and Penn Terra Group Ltd.

A 20-year funding commitment from NRH was requested in order to secure project financing.

It's expected to cost NRH between $60,000 and $72,000 per year and monthly payments are expected to begin in 2018.

See HOUSING on A5

Pelham NEWS
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COMMENT

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Great Christmas spirit in Pelham

DAVE AUGUSTYN

The snow this weekend in Niagara seemed to tie the great spirit of Christmas together in Pelham.

The holiday celebrations began early in Pelham on November 2 when several businesses hosted holiday open houses downtown Fonthill. Despite the rain that evening, there was a good crowd, including a Santa with an umbrella.

Over the following weeks, the town began decorating much of Pelham, from Peace Park and the Bandshell in Fonthill, to town hall and hydro poles in Pelham's urbanized areas, even including the flagpole and trees in Fenwick.

Some very dedicated community-minded elves took it upon themselves to spruce-up our town. While the rest of us were sleeping or working, these elves decorated almost every utility pole and light standard in sight using evergreen boughs and red bows. So many of us appreciate their annual efforts.

Then, the Fonthill Firefighters Association took the lead for the turkey raffle tradition, followed closely by the Fenwick Firefighters and the Fonthill Lions (with a chili cook off to boot).

Thanks to Christmas In Pelham volunteers and town staff for organizing the fourth Christmas Under the Arches/Outdoor Christmas Market in Fonthill on December 2. The hundreds participating, the venders, services clubs, and musicians helped make the event wonderful and vibrant.

Then hundreds shared the true spirit of generosity on December 3tb for tbe 26tb Annual Pelham Food Drive for Pelham Cares. Thank you to each of the donors and all the volunteers that went door-to-door to support those less fortunate in our town. Thanks, as well, for those volunteers unpacking, sorting, and repacking non-perishable food. Finally, thanks to the businesses who donated food and funds so volunteers were fed and the event was publicized.

BERND FRANKE/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Children re-enact the first Christmas on the Ridgeville Bible Chapel float in the Pelham Santa Claus Parade.

And, have you seen the Temperanceville Historic Display this year? Check out Pelham's history, caringly modeled in Peace Park until New Years Day.

This past weekend the Fabulous Fenwick Lions and others in the community organized Pelham's annual Santa Claus Parade. The extra-long parade ended with Buddy the Elf driving Santa through downtown Fenwick and past the special community Christmas tree. Thanks also to the Lions for organizing free treats and time with Santa at Centennial Park.

Add to all this, the Christmas concerts at our schools, the annual Fonthill Kinsmen Seniors' Dinner, the greeting cards, and all the celebrations at Pelham's churches, and we are doing well to prepare for and to celebrate Christmas.

Council and I hope you and your family experience the joy of the spirit of Christmas this boliday season. We also wish you all the best in 2017.

You may contact Mayor Dave at mayordave@pelham.ca or read past columns at www.pelhammayordave.blogspot.com.

Wine doesn't have to add to your waistline

BOB TYMCZYSZYN

It's no secret that most of us will probably notice a difference as we step on the weight scale after the bolidays.

And no, standing with one foot in the air will not shed any real weight.

In our family, the holidays have become more about the food, the friends and family getting together than about presents.

We do buy what is known at our house as Christmas pop, not to be touched except for guests and those special meals.

It has grown to be include Christmas nuts, chips, water and anything else we didn't want the kids to devour.

The tradition continues to this day.

It also includes wine now, and I will be paying particular attention to keeping them lower in alcohol — it's just one way of controlling the calories we take in over the holidays.

And even though wine is good for so many reasons, its consumption does come with a cost.

An average glass (5oz.) of low alcohol Riesling will ring in at 100-135 calories, while a glass of full-bodied red will carry about 150 calories.

To put this into perspective, a lemon poppyseed donut at Tim Hortons will weigh in at 370 calories, and a small double-double coffee is 140 calories according to the company's nutrition info.

The calorie count on a glass of wine will actually be a combination of residual sugar and alcohol content.

So a sweeter white (at around 9 per cent) like a Moscato might come in lower in calories than a dryer white like a chardonnay (at 13 per cent). And a light bodied Pinot Noir at 12 per cent will have a lot fewer calories than a full-bodied Cabernet Sauvignon with 15 per cent.

So to watch your waistline, look to German style Rieslings or a Pinot Grigio. There are lots of fantastic low alcohol Rieslings here in Niagara.

And stick with low alcohol versions of Gamay and Pinot Noir for your reds.

Keeping with that thought in mind, I recently tasted the Tawse Gamay Noir 2014.

Light to medium bodied, it has a beautiful translucent purplish colour. The nose shows off the dark cherry fruit, and the taste shows some complexity, especially good for wine at this price.

Smooth but with a toucb of acidity, this is very fine wine as guests arrive and will do well with your meal.

With a lower alcohol of 12.5 per cent and low residual sugar this Beamsville, beauty fits the bill perfectly.

As an aside, I recently came across a video, from the Winealign website. WineAlign is a Canadian group that details and reviews from all over the world.

In the video, a group of three blind taste a single wine and I found their choices, without spoiler to be interesting.

I have personally seen someone pick out the varietal, the country, and even the vintage which shows the extraordinary palate that some have. The video is worth a peek at www.youtube.com/watch?v=kPyQOCOQkro.

BOB TYMCZYSZYN/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

2014 Tawse Gamay Noir from the Niagara Region. One of the excellent choices for holiday wines and spirits.

So never feel intimidated, if there is something you like, don't be afraid to bring it or gift it.

And I know any wines I'll be gifting will be VQA, we've got a lot to be proud of.

So enjoy the food the wine and the friendship this holiday but maybe just stay away from the sugar plums which contain about 120 calories each.

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NRH funding 20 units

HOUSING from A3

Money for the program will be reallocated from the rent supplement program.

St. Catharines Mayor Walter Sendzik commended staff for the innovative approach.

It's a chance, he said, for Niagara to "take a calculated opportunity and seize it with a third-party operator in terms of finance development and a not-for-profit to help address the housing shortage we have."

Sendzik felt it was an "important moment" for Niagara that will significantly impact housing in the future.

He believes it will help to "accelerate chipping away" at the ever-growing wait list.

If the initial project goes well, "I think it will set the stage for a lot more investment in the community for affordable housing and will help those in our community that have been on that list for far too long," he said.

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IN BRIEF

Students design town's Christmas card

A dozen Pelham students have "Home for the Holidays" drawings on the town's official Christmas card.

Mayor Dave Augustyn told the students and their families at last Monday's town council meeting, the greeting cards are sent to Niagara officials, MPs and MPPs as well as to people who do business with the town.

They also go to the prime minister, the premier and Ontario's Lieutenant Governor.

The student card artists are: Gwen Farrow, Ashley Goedee, Myranda Hartley, Maddie Morrison, Emma Nigh, Jayden Pelletier, Laura Schaefer, Amelia Siolkowsky, Sarah Snelgrove, Abigail Thibodeau, India Valli, and Julia Woernert.

Town buys bulk water station site

Town councillast Monday approved a $175,000 purchase of land it has been leasing as a bulk water station.

The town bought the property from the estate of the late owner.

It set up the water station at Canboro Road and Effingham Street in 2010. The water department sells potable water to individuals and private water haulers.

Pelham had been leasing the land for $14,000 annually.

In a report, staff said the purchase allows the town to control all access to the property. By eliminating the rent, it will also provide for a better business operation. A garage on the site gives the town additional storage space.

Before it had the station, Pelham earned $42,000 annually from bulk water sales. By 2014, it received $97,000. With a new automatic payment system it expects even more revenue.

Pelham moving away from cash grants

Pelham is changing its grants policy to cover requests from not-for-profit organizations after the town's budget is set.

Treasurer Cari Pupo said last Monday the policy will limit individual grants to a maximum of $2,500 and provide council with a discretionary fund of up to $20,000 for use throughout the year.

The new policy will move to grants-in-kind for town labour during significant community events and away from cash grants. It will also limit the waiving of fees to special events rather than for regular meetings.

The new policy will be brought to council later for approval.

Transfer tax is relative

Pelham passed a resolution last Monday supporting Quebec MP Guy Caron's private member's bill, Bill C-274, which calls for equal tax treatment for family members and third party purchasers in the transfer of a small business, farm or fishing operation.

Currently family members pay a higher tax rate than non-relatives.

Ward 2 Coun. Gary Accursi said it costs more to sell to a son than to a member of the general public.

Mayor Dave Augustyn suggested circulating the letter to Welland-Pelham Chamber of Commerce and Pelham Business Association. Ward 3 Coun. Peter Papp added local lawyers and accountants.

Ward 1 Coun. Richard Rybiak said a rural community such as Pelham appreciates the value of transferring a farm to family members. They are more likely to remain in the community.

Rain fails to dampen outdoor market

Raindrops rather than snowflakes fell on Pelham's sixth annual Outdoor Christmas Market two Friday's ago.

However, it did attract 3,348 people, up from 1,800 the year before, said recreation director Vickie van Ravenswaay.

A downpour, during the event under the arches in downtown Fonthill, drove visitors indoors to downtown restaurants and shops, she said.

When it stopped, they came out. The artisan sales and entertainment went on until 10 p.m.

– Wayne Campbell, special to Postmedia Network

Donations, traffic up at festival of lights

RAY SPITERI
Postmedia Network

RAY SPITERI/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Winter Festival of Lights.

The Winter Festival of Lights is on track for another banner year.

After three weeks, officials have seen a 10 per cent increase in vehicle traffic and a 12 per cent spike in donations at Dufferin Islands in Niagara Falls.

The festival is also a favourite for tour buses, as 173 have already been through the park — compared to 140 last season.

"We're really excited. It's been going really good," said Tina Myers, the event's executive director.

"The money (from donations) goes towards the maintenance of the lights. Just to set up, tear down and maintain them through the year costs probably close to $200,000. Last year we got about $175,000 in donations, that all went towards the maintenance."

The 34th edition of the festival began Nov. 19 and continues until Jan. 31.

Niagara Parks Commission has invested $300,000 on lighting, programming and infrastructure improvements within Queen Victoria Park.

New additions include a 10-foot tall 3D woolly mammoth as part of the Canadian wildlife displays at Dufferin Islands.

There are also several illumination-themed events throughout the entire 56-kilometre Niagara Parks, and a new $4-million LED lighting system that provides twice the lighting levels on the Horseshoe and American Falls.

"We added 55 lights to the Canadian Niagara Power Plant. We illuminated it all in green and red and that's part of a three-phase plan," said Myers.

"We're going to continue to add lights and then we're going to animate it.

"We also have ... 60,000 lights all across from Dufferin Islands, so when you exit, now there's all these other illuminations that are right there on the trees."

Myers said the festival is not just popular with tourists. She said residents also enjoy taking in all the sights and sounds with their families.

Last year, the festival attracted more than 1.2 million visitors and had a direct economic impact of $54 million in Niagara.

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MIKE DIBATTISTA/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Niagara Clifton Group president Charlie Burland on Clifton Hill in Niagara Falls where construction has begun on a new circus-themed mirror and laser-maze attraction.

Mirror maze attraction coming to Clifton Hill

RAY SPITERI
Postmedia Network

Construction is underway on a $3-million, circus-themed mirror and laser-maze attraction on Clifton Hill in Niagara Falls.

It will replace the former Brick City, which was a giant mini city of Legos.

That attraction was demolished last fall after a fire in the attic of the Haunted House next door in August 2014 caused water and smoke damage.

"It was a gift store that was built in 1960, and then it had a Cinema 180 movie theatre on top of it, which then became Brick City," Niagara Clifton Group president Charlie Burland said.

Burland's family has owned property on the north side of the hill for 90 years.

"When we had the fire ... we had the option of rebuilding what was there, or ... rebuild an attraction that we thought would do better than what was there before."

Burland said his father wanted to open a mirror maze for decades, so when the opportunity became available "we knew what we were going to do."

He said construction on the 2,500-square-foot Big Top Amazing Mirror and Laser Maze attraction began right after Labour Day, and the aim is to open between April and June.

He said the Big Top Amazing Mirror and Laser Maze will cost about $3 million.

"It's basically two attractions in one. You can do the mirror-maze portion, or you can do the laser-maze portion, or you can do both."

"You go through about half the mirror maze, and then you go into a few other rooms. One is a claustrophobic room, one is a curtain chaos, which is a curtain maze, and then when you go through those, then you get back into the mirror maze, and you find your way out."

He said the attraction will feature animated characters such as lions, tigers and tightrope walkers.

Burland said his company has started marketing the attraction, including an information banner wrapped around the front part of the construction site.

He said it will be for all ages, and will be accessible to those with disabilities.

Burland said it's a good time to improve the attraction offerings on his properties because of the rebound the Niagara Falls tourism industry has experienced in recent years.

"We had the best year since Sept. 11 (2001)," he said. "The U.S. dollar helps, it keeps Canadians home, it attracts the Americans. With all the instability in Europe, a lot of Americans and Canadians decided to stay home."

"I think a lot of Europeans decided to come to Canada because we're relatively a safe country."

Burland said those in the industry often talk about the "perfect storm" of issues that have hurt the sector in past years, such as the Sept. 11 terror attacks in the United States, and the subsequent requirement for North American cross-border travellers to carry passports.

"This (past year) was the perfect storm, but it was the perfect storm in the right direction for a change," he said.

"What will next year be like? Everything is pointing toward next year being as good as this year, if not better, but who knows."

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Sunday, Dec 18 1:00-2:20pm Tues, Dec 20 7:30-8:30pm	Thursday, Dec 15 1:00-2:00pm	*Register online for next seoson!* Starts Jan 9	Friday, Dec 16 10:00-11:00am Tues, Dec 20 1:00-2:00pm	Friday, Dec 16 9:00-10:00am Tuesday, Dec 20 8:00-9:00am	Thurs, Dec 15 10:30-11:30am Monday Dec 19 9:30-10:30am	Thurs, Dec 15 9:30-10:30am *Register online for next season*	Thurs, Dec 15 2:00-3:00pm Monday Dec 19 11:00-12:00pm	Friday Dec 16 7:30-9:30pm

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November 2, 2016 – January 1, 2017

Get ready for the holidays. Check out these great upcoming events in Town & watch for more next week!

December 17 (2pm): Christmas Concert by Cabar-EH Youth Theatre Vocal Ensemble – Fonthill Public Library. Free
December 18 (11am-1pm): Annual Gingerbread House Contest – Fonthill Legion. Free
December 23 (7:30pm): Christmas in the Village Concert with Melissa Marie Shriner – Pelham Community Church. Tickets $17 in advance, $20 at the door

Visit pelham.ca/christmas-in-pelham for full details.

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19	20	21	22	23 8:30AM-12:00PM
Regular Office Hours 8:30AM to 4:30PM				
26 OFFICE CLOSED	27 OFFICE CLOSED	28 8:30AM-4:30PM	29 8:30AM-4:30PM	30 8:30AM-12:00PM
2 2017 OFFICE CLOSED	3	4	5	6
Regular Office Hours 8:30AM to 4:30PM				

visit www.pelham.ca for details

WIN Pelham BUCKS

Pelham NIAGARA

Happy Holidays

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Galleria welcomes new stores

LAURA BARTON
Postmedia Network

The Welland Galleria is beginning to fill up as more businesses move to the downtown core.

Despite being open for three years, there are still many people that don't know where or what the galleria is.

"It's like a quaint little mall right here in downtown Welland," said Stephanie Hicks, executive director of the Downtown Business Improvement Area.

The 12-unit shopping centre was once The Peoples store, but was transformed in 2013 to accommodate smaller businesses.

Inspire Hair Design has been there for two years already, but last Friday some other businesses officially joined it. The grand opening for four businesses was celebrated with cake and ribbon-cutting.

"We're pumping out businesses, so it' s a great place for new businesses to come on in and see what it's about," Hicks said.

Tre Barnes, owner of Tre B's, which sells geek and pop culture collectables and custom T-shirts and one of the new businesses, said he likes the mini-mall concept and the benefits each business can have on each other. He described it as a "little tight-knit community" that can help bring in traffic and create more awareness the galleria even exists.

"The biggest thing that I hear in this place, which is really unfortunate, is that 95 per cent of people come in bere and they're like, 'I never knew this place was here. I never knew.' And that's what we're trying to change," he said.

Welland Mayor Frank Campion is optimistic the galleria will see success though. He said as more businesses open up, it will attract others to the area, too.

"If you can bring people into an area that has multiple businesses, it makes it much easier for people to shop locally," he said, noting this also plays into the shopping local emphasis he's looking for in the community.

"In essence, one business supports the other business, so all of them, it's almost communal."

He added he likes to see the confidence people have for the downtown area and appreciates business owners that are choosing to open their doors there.

LAURA BARTON/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Niagara Centre MP Vance Badawey adds some brush strokes to a canvas Pat Cassavoy, owner of Studio Cassavoy, has set out during the grand opening celebrations of four businesses in the Welland Galleria, including her own.

Dolorese Wright, chairwoman of the Downtown BIA, said the amount of businesses opening in Welland lately is a sure sign the city has turned a comer.

"Welland has been the best kept secret in a long time and people are discovering it is definitely the place to open up a business," she said.

Hicks said the Welland Galleria's location on East Main Street, just east of the Main Street Bridge and the waterfront, provides a beautiful view.

The businesses celebrating their grand openings last Friday were Anjou- Voluptuous Women's Apparel, Tre B's, Studio Cassavoy and ill! HQ Vapor and Apparel. There are still seven units available for other businesses.

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Region passes two-per-cent tax hike

MARYANNE FIRTH
Postmedia Network

With the approval of a new infrastructure levy, regional council solidified a two-per-cent tax hike for 2017.

The increase will mean the average household, with a home assessed at $240,500, will have to shell out an additional $28 for the regional portion of the property tax bill.

The budget totals $1.1 billion, with $479 million coming from Niagara's tax and ratepayers.

Despite setting its own budget increase guidance at one per cent when deliberations got underway this summer, council in an 18-9 vote opted to double that amount through the introduction of a one-per-cent infrastructure levy recommended by staff at the final budget meeting of the year last week.

That additional one per cent, amounting to about $3.25 million, will be put into a council-mandated infrastructure deficit reduction fund for unspecified future infrastructure needs.

Grimsby Coun. Tony Quirk said he was both "concerned and skeptical" about the budget recommendation being presented so late in the game.

Staff worked "aggressively" to ensure guidance was met because "we recognized that the people of Niagara have a huge tax burden on top of everything else that's coming down the pipe in 2017," he said, adding the new direction defies that logic.

The infrastructure deficit, estimated at about $185 million, includes projects that have yet to be approved on a go-forward basis, Quirk said.

He felt the process was premature until an updated asset management plan is in place, as well as the framework for a capital deficit strategy.

An updated plan, which will identify the condition and lifespan of all regional infrastructure, is expected to be presented to council in early 2017.

When the asset management plan is presented to council, a secondary report will also be prepared to show where the new levy dollars will be used.

See HIKE on A12

Hamilton Niagara Haldimand Brant CCAC CASC Community Care Access Centre Centre d'acces aux soins communautaires

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LOCALNEWS

'We know there are expenses that are coming'

HIKE from A8

While he agreed with the concept, budget chairman David Barrick also opposed the levy increase.

"Simply put we're just not ready. ... We don't have that asset management plan in place," he said. "We have a solution to a problem that hasn't been fully flesbed out yet."

After budget committee passed the recommendation, the Port Colborne councillor said he heard "loud and clear" from his constituents they are not happy "with the concept of raising their taxes to put it in the bank."

He recommended that staff instead set aside the projected $3-million capital surplus from 2016 to fund the 2017 ask.

Acting corporate services commissioner Jason Burgess said the surplus is earmarked for the taxpayer relief fund and cannot be used for capital.

"I think we need to get our house in order," Barrick said. "But more importantly we need to demonstrate to the public that we have our house in order before we dip into their pockets again."

The first step in creating that order is introducing the infrastructure levy, St. Catharines Mayor Walter Sendzik said.

He felt it was a "prudent move" required to help address the Region's future infrastructure needs.

St. Catharines last year approved a one-per-cent levy for five years based on its asset management plan and other municipalities, many facing infrastructure deficits, have since followed suit.

> **"Simply put we're just not ready. ... We don't have that asset management plan in place. We have a solution to a problem that hasn't been fully fleshed out yet."**
>
> Grimsby Coun. Tony Quirk

"I know sitting around this council there will be councillors who will say 'No' because they want to look good in the press," Sendzik said. "The reality is we have a job to do here. We have a responsibility and this sets us on a course with the proper structure in place that allows the public to see exactly where these dollars are going to be spent."

"We need to show them that this capital budget levy is being targeted to reduce what is a significant issue facing communities across Ontario, including Niagara."

The $3.25 million will remain in the budget annually to add to the reserve.

St. Catharines Coun. Brian Heit felt it was only fair to taxpayers to introduce the minimal increase now rather that a larger increase later.

Large tax hikes are often not far behind years when not enough money is collected, he said, wanting to protect Niagara from that fate down the road.

"We know there are expenses that are coming," he said of the infrastructure needs.

"We can assume one of these days interest rates are going to go up, and it's going to cost us more on everything we do. It's advisable to get the money now to invest when we can, have some money in the bank."

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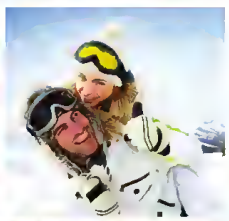

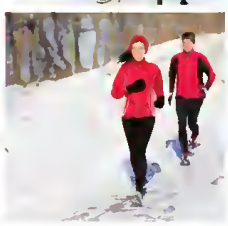

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Police officers injured on the job

BILL SAWCHUK
Postmedia Network

A Niagara Regional Police officer was struck by a hit-and-run driver while directing traffic in St. Catharines last Wednesday.

The driver was charged with impaired driving. The police officer, a nine-year veteran, was taken to hospital in St. Catharines where he was treated and released. His left shoulder and wrist were injured.

The officer was wearing a reflective traffic jacket and using a flashlight to move vehicles along Ontario Street near Cecil Street at a crash scene.

He attempted to direct a white Dodge Journey away from the collision when he was hit.

The officer's partner saw what happened and was able stop the Journey with the assistance of other officers a short distance away on Ontario Street.

Jordyn Acaster of Pelham has been charged with impaired operation causing bodily harm, exceed 80 mg blood alcohol causing bodily harm, dangerous operation of a motor vehicle causing bodily harm and failing to stop at the scene of an accident causing bodily harm.

Earlier in the evening in Grimsby, an eight-year veteran responded to a home near Fly Road for an accident report. While on the property, he was attacked by a dog, who latched onto his leg.

As the officer struggled to free himself from the dog, he fell and injured his arm. He was taken to hospital where he was treated and released.

A couple hours later at 2:15 a.m., a nine-year veteran responded to a report of an intoxicated male in a car in the drive-thru at a McDonalds on Macdonell Street in St. Catharines.

As the officer arrested the man for impaired driving, the suspect resisted and struggled with the officer

The officer was able to secure the male in the cruiser and began transport to the lockup in Niagara Falls. The man feigned unresponsiveness, but then attacked the officer by kicking at him when the door was opened for a welfare check.

The officer was able to subdue the man a second time.

The officer was assessed by paramedics and did not require treatment at a hospital.

Erik Olesen, 45, of Thorold, is charged with impaired operation of a motor vehicle, operating a motor vehicle over 80 and resisting arrest.

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Wainfleet calls for NPCA audit

GRANT LAFLECHE
Postmedia Network

POSTMEDIA NETWORK FILE PHOTO

Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority administration offices on Thorold Rd. in Welland.

The Township of Wainfleet and its mayor, April Jeffs, have joined the chorus of voices calling for a comprehensive audit of Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority.

Jeffs last week put forward a motion asking the conservation authority to hire "an independent third party" to conduct an audit "such as a value-for-money audit and/or forensic audit, above and beyond their annual financial audits."

Wainfleet's town council passed the motion.

Jeffs, a member of the NPCA board of directors, said recent controversies surrounding NPCA and the public appetite for an audit are impossible to ignore.

She said things have reached a point where an audit is necessary to answer questions about NPCA's governance and transparency.

"I always come back to a simple question. 'What would I do in Wainfleet?'" she said in an interview Sunday.

"And if this was Wainfleet, I would request an audit."

The call from Wainfleet's council for an NPCA audit is the second Niagara council ask for the review this month.

Last week, St. Catharines city council passed a motion to send a letter to Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne and the Ministry of Natural Resources to begin an investigation and forensic audit of the NPCA.

Welland NDP MPP Cindy Forster has also called for a probe of the NPCA.

The authority came under scrutiny recently after local activist Ed Smith issued a report critical of the NPCA titled "A Call for Accountability at the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority."

JEFFS

Smith's report is critical of the way the authority operates and alleges management at the authority is rife with conflicts of interest and questionable practices.

NPCA has threatened legal action against Smith for distributing his report, and has demanded an apology. It has also asked Smith to concede to a written "undertaking" confirming he will not distribute the report and that he will not make any defamatory statements about the authority in the future.

The night St. Catharines city council debated the motion to send a letter to Queen's Park, NPCA board chairman and St. Catharines regional Coun. Bruce Timms said a forensic audit is a waste of money.

Jeffs said Sunday while she prefers a value-for-money audit of NPCA, she remains open to other types of audits.

The mayor supported a motion at Niagara regional council in May calling for an NPCA audit, but that motion was defeated.

However, she said interest in an audit has grown since then, and she believes are there other NPCA board members who would like to go forward with it.

Jeffs said she intends to raise the issue directly at the next NPCA board meeting. The meeting is not until next month, she said, giving her time to properly frame how she wants to present the request for an audit to the board.

glafleche@postmedia.com
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Applications are available at www.nrh.ca or by calling Regional Councillor Paul Grenier, NRH Chair at 905-980-6000 x 3965. The deadline for submissions is January 13, 2017. We thank all interested parties; but only those being considered for positions will be contacted.

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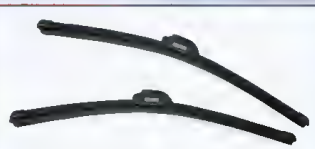

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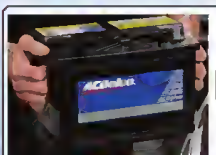

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Autism program a holiday gift

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Colleen Egan helps Gavin Warren do his Christmas shopping at Grapeview School afternoon during the Autism Niagara Holiday Shopping Day.

The breakthrough came when Stephanie Reid's son gave her a black purse.

It was 10 years ago, and Reid's son was diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder.

His condition made shopping, particularly at Christmas time, extraordinary difficult.

The sights, the crowds and noise were too much for him to manage.

Ultimately, Reid couldn't take him shopping and her son could never pick out what gifts he would like to give to his family.

"I would buy a few things, and then he could pick which of them he wanted to give to someone afterwards," Reid said.

"But he never got to do the things so many of us just take for granted."

That changed when Reid enrolled him in a Christmas Shopping Day program hosted by Autism Ontario.

The program allowed autistic children to shop in a calm, friendly environment.

And that was how he picked out the purse.

"It is sometimes hard for autistic children to conceptualize in the third person," Reid said.

"They know what they want, but they have a hard time understanding what someone else wants."

When her son gave her the purse on Christmas day, he told her be had overheard her talking to his father about needing a new purse.

"He said to me, 'I thought you would really like this,'" Reid said. "Well, I just burst into tears, it was such a big breakthrough."

Recently, Autism Ontario had to give up the program because of a lack of resources to run it.

So, Reid and another mother approached Autism Ontario and said they would operate the program as a third party.

On Saturday, they held the first Autism Niagara Holiday Shopping Day at Grapeview School in St. Catharines.

No more than four children at a time were allowed in the classroom converted into a small shopping area, filled with items drawn from the Christmas lists of the children.

There were no loud noises, loud Christmas music or anything else that might overwhelm them.

Reid said each child was escorted by teacher or educational assistant, labelled as "elves" for the day, to help the children shop.

About 80 children with autism came to the program, ranging in age from 3½ to 18 years old, Reid said.

By providing an environment the children are comfortable in, Reid said the program allows them to participate in Christmas in a way they would not otherwise be able to.

For more information about the program, Reid can be reached at autismholidayshopping@gmail.com.

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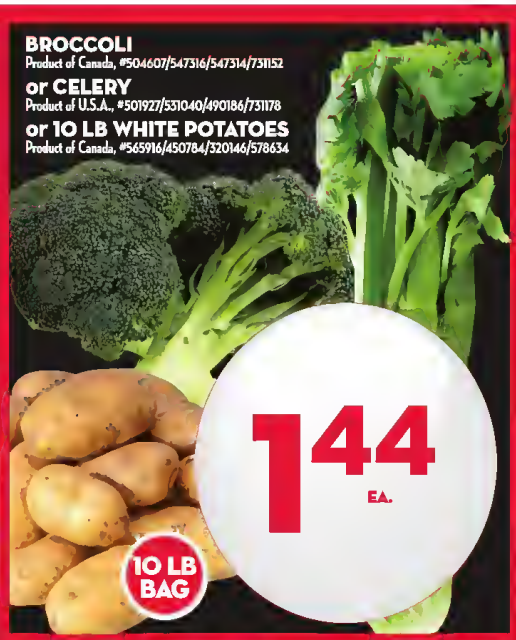

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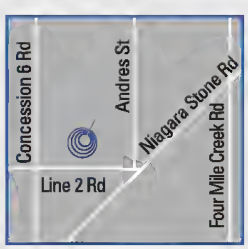

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